



Working together for a healthier Belfast

Response to Belfast Rapid Transit Public consultation on route options

Department for Regional Development

December 2011

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the opportunity to comment on the route proposals for Rapid Transit. The key point in this submission is that Rapid Transit must be seen as a local service, as well as a commuter service for people working in the city centre. Accessibility should therefore be prioritised, in particular in terms of ensuring good connectivity from neighbourhoods some distance away from the proposed routes. In addition, integrated ticketing with Metro services is important to increase attractiveness of the service and support cross city connections.

Introduction

Belfast Healthy Cities is a citywide partnership whose vision is of a healthy, equitable and vibrant city where all sectors provide individual and shared leadership, enabling citizens to achieve their full potential. Belfast is a leading World Health Organization (WHO) Healthy City, and the Belfast Healthy Cities' office provides a direct link to WHO. As the current secretariat of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, Belfast Healthy Cities also has direct links to over 90 other European Healthy Cities.

The role of the partnership is, through our leadership and innovation, to inspire and harness the collective and individual strengths of partners to *deliver the WHO European Healthy City* goals and requirements and maximise their impact on health and inequalities. The focus of the global Healthy Cities movement, including ours, is on the wider physical and social living conditions that shape health and wellbeing, and creating conditions that support health and tackle inequalities.

Our key areas of work include Healthy Urban Environment, including climate change and health, and Health Equity in All Local Policies. Our work focuses on developing new programmes, piloting innovative concepts, capacity building and collating and sharing evidence. The Healthy Urban Environment programme aims to highlight how the physical environment shapes people's lives, and how action to create people friendly environments can achieve synergies between health, the environment and the economy. Active living is a key sub theme, with a focus on environments that support people to choose active travel, or indeed public transport.



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Rationale for response

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the initiative to develop Rapid Transit in Belfast. High quality public transport offers people and communities access to jobs and services, which significantly supports health and wellbeing, including economic wellbeing. Walking to and from public transport also contributes naturally to physical activity, with associated health benefits. Indeed, some research indicates that increasing public transport usage can be more effective than any other intervention to increase physical activity.¹ From this perspective, it is important that halts are linked to good active travel facilities, to further encourage usage and discourage car use in particular for short journeys and shorter commutes. It would be helpful if an appropriate link was made to the emerging Active Travel Strategy, and indeed other relevant strategies including the Sustainable Development Implementation Plan, and forthcoming public health and economic strategies.

The benefits of public transport outlined above directly prevent ill health and can generate savings in the health budget. From an environmental perspective, like active travel public transport can reduce private car usage, with the benefits that brings. It is also worth noting that high quality public transport can for its part help tackle unemployment, by increasing the geographical area relevant for job search. This can have particular benefits for people in more disadvantaged areas who do not have a car, and therefore are limited in their ability to take up jobs some distance away from their home.

A travel hierarchy prioritising active travel can also act as a catalyst for wider city or regional development. For example, the transport planning model developed in Kuopio in Finland aims to support regeneration, and to increase attractiveness of the town centre compared to out of town development. This model, which was presented in Belfast in October 2011 at a seminar arranged by Belfast Healthy Cities, incorporates a pedestrian city centre, surrounded by a zone focused on public transport, linking to a wider area and car based transport. In short, the aim is to make it possible for people to come to the city by car, in order to support a viable city centre, but transport within the city centre is primarily active travel, and people living within a 5 mile radius are also able to rely on public transport to get around the city. This model, which has helped reinvigorate Kuopio and generated substantial modal switch while reducing problems of congestion and parking, has been gradually

¹ Krizek, Forsyth & Baum, *Walking and cycling: an international literature review*, Department of Transport, Victoria, 2009. Available at [http://www.transport.vic.gov.au/DOI/DOIElect.nsf/\\$UNIDS+for+Web+Display/70D43560D1141DDFCA2575E8000BA1EE/\\$FILE/WalkingCyclingLiteratureReview.pdf](http://www.transport.vic.gov.au/DOI/DOIElect.nsf/$UNIDS+for+Web+Display/70D43560D1141DDFCA2575E8000BA1EE/$FILE/WalkingCyclingLiteratureReview.pdf)



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implemented from the 1990s and is increasingly a model adopted across Finland. It may be of interest to local decision makers, not only in relation to transport provision in Belfast, but also in relation to regional development more generally.

Belfast Healthy Cities would be happy to provide further information on this model, should that be helpful.

Comments on the route proposals

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the extent of information given regarding the route options considered and the criteria applied, which is helpful for putting the proposed route options in context. It is positive to see a reference to accessibility among the criteria, as this is an essential aspect of a public transport system aimed at meeting the needs of as many people as possible. In short, in-city public transport services need to link key desired destinations within the city, in addition to providing reliable journey times into the centre. It is particularly welcome that the proposed routes emphasise access to health care and regional public transport hubs.

In terms of the route proposals, it would be helpful to clarify to what extent consideration has been given to linkages between the routes outside the city centre. In particular, this applies to linkages between the EWAY and CITI routes, which have significant potential to improve access to job opportunities in the Titanic Quarter for people in east Belfast and beyond. However, to improve accessibility, it would be important to provide linkage within east Belfast to shorten and simplify journeys required. This is important to improve the attractiveness of the Rapid Transit service, but in particular to ensure equity of access to the jobs being created in the Titanic Quarter for people from all areas in the city. There may be a number of options for this, including the use of orbital routes to connect the two routes; such a solution could also improve accessibility across east Belfast. At present, the lack of orbital services means that for example people seeking to access health care need to travel to the city centre and change buses, which significantly increases journey times and makes public transport a less attractive option.

Orbital services or feeder routes may also be an option to improve access to the EWAY and WWAY routes from neighbourhoods lying further out in east and west Belfast. This is vital, as the preferred routes as presently outlined exclude access to the service for many people in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the city, including the Whiterock and Upper Springfield areas of west Belfast. Improving access to transport, however, is one element required to tackle the persistent disadvantage, since transport affects the area relevant for job search.



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In a general sense, it is important that Rapid Transit is viewed as more than a commuter service for people living outside Belfast and working in the city centre. To ensure equity and underpin a sustainable approach to tackling disadvantage, people in the inner and middle city must be identified as a key user group even where their income alone is not sufficient to sustain a high frequency service. From an environmental viewpoint, this is also important to encourage public transport for shorter journeys, which is needed to help tackle climate change and reduce vulnerability in the face of increasingly volatile energy prices. There may be opportunities to combine fast journeys for commuters in the peak periods with high accessibility, for example by incorporating 'express' services that make fewer stops.

Good connectivity to local services is one aspect of an attractive service for city residents. However, a fully accessible service also includes an affordable fare structure, and indeed appropriate payment system. While off board ticketing and cashless payment is a very good way of speeding up journeys and a helpful option for the majority of commuters, it may be less suitable for example for older people, who may not be comfortable using ticket machines and cashless systems. In addition, some people from lower income backgrounds may also be less able to use such systems. Therefore, suitable alternatives such as pre paid tickets sold in newsagents etc should be considered to maximise user friendliness.

Transferability of tickets with Metro services is also important, and it would be helpful to clarify at an early stage how this will be facilitated. A fully integrated system would be the best option, but at minimum, options such as transferability within an hour and/or with feeder routes should be considered.

Finally, it is notable that the Rapid Transit system at this stage excludes north and south Belfast. It is therefore important to consider how existing Metro services can support linkage and increased accessibility from these areas. In particular, linkage from north Belfast to the CITI route is important, to enable residents from north Belfast and beyond to access education and job opportunities in the Titanic Quarter. This is important in order to support equitable and balanced development across the city; ensuring equitable access from north Belfast is particularly important to support a shared future as well as increased prosperity. In the longer term, experience from the initial Rapid Transit routes should be used to assess the feasibility of expanding the network to south and north Belfast.